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# Local

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## U-pickers won't be grinning

### Freeze, hail, drought hit local orchards hard

By Beverly Fortune

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Peaches and Asian pears usually start to ripen this time of year at Reed Valley Orchard in Bourbon County, nearly ready for people to come pick.

Not this year.

Central Kentucky orchards normally would be gearing up for the start of the u-pick season. But it will be slim pickins for customers after freezing temperatures in April severely damaged Kentucky's fruit crop. A hail storm a few weeks later only compounded the damage.

Peaches and pears are a 100 percent loss in many orchards. A small bright spot: Apples turned out to be hardier than predicted in the spring.

"We have no Asian or European pears," said Trudie Reed, owner of Reed Valley Orchard. About 10 percent of the Reeds' peach crop survived, which Reed and her family will pick and then sell by the bushel.

"We're not letting the peaches be u-picked. There's too much waste, and we can't afford that," she said.



DAVID STEPHENSON/LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER

Trudie Reed rang up apple-buying customer Meghan Graham at Reed Valley Orchard near Cynthiana Monday. "On some apples we have a 50 percent crop, some 20 percent, and some others more than 50 percent," said Reed. Photo by David Stephenson | Staff



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Reed Valley trees produced a "decent crop" of apples, she said. While 60 percent of the blueberries were lost, blackberries are producing a bumper crop.

Lorena Browning and her daughter-in-law each picked 10 quarts of blackberries yesterday, berries that Browning said "are beautiful, and delicious." Bushes are loaded.

Browning, of Lexington, plans to go back for another blackberry-picking excursion. Blackberries took less of a hit because their flowers had barely begun to form when the freeze came.

Haney's Appledale Farm, in Nancy, Ky. won't offer u-pick apples this year, owner Donald Haney said. "People love u-pick, but in reduced fruit years, we simply don't have enough to do that." Farm employees will pick apples for sale on the farm and for pies in the bakery.

Bill Clarey, spokesman for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, said apples have proven a bit "hardier than we first thought, so it's not the total loss we feared in April. But there's a significant amount of crop loss."

Kentucky's fruit crop has a retail value of \$19 million annually, according to John Strang, University of Kentucky fruit extension specialist. Cost estimates of damage are between between \$8 and \$10 million.

Reed, like many growers, will apply for a federal loan this fall from the Farm Service Agency to get start-up money for planting new trees next year. "We won't have any reserve from this year," she said. The loan will be \$1,000 to \$2,000. "It's never very much but it helps," she said.

Kevan Evans, owner of Evans Orchard & Cider Mill in Georgetown, said his apple trees made it through the freeze, but had a hard time earlier this summer because of the drought.

"We don't have quite the size we like on our apples, but we'll start picking early-to-mid-August," he said. "We'll let a little u-pick go on."

Different types of apples fared different ways. Evans said he is "light on Fuji's, but we'll have Ginger Gold and a full crop of Gold Rush." There should be plenty of Gala, "popular with u-pickers," Evans said.

Reed has an excellent crop of Golden Delicious, but said she is thin on Stayman Winesap. "On some apples we have a 50 percent crop, some 20 percent, and some others more than 50 percent," she said.

Boyd Orchards on Pinckard Pike in Woodford County will supplement its apple crop with apples that Terry Boyd has arranged to buy from a friend's orchard in Indiana.

"We're not picking any apples. We're going to leave those for people who want to pick their own. It's the entertainment factor," he said.

Boyd hopes to sell peaches grown in Michigan or Colorado. He will have to charge "a little more than last year, but prices won't be double, which they really need to be to cover the costs," he said. "We really do this to appease our customers."

To make up for lost revenue, several orchards are adding or expanding agri-tourism features.

Haney's Appledale Farm expanded its bakery, where it sells homemade fruit pies.

Evans Orchard increased the size of the play area for children, plus its kitchen and covered patio. Customers can now order rib-eye steak sandwiches, hamburgers and hot dogs.

The farm store also added more Kentucky Proud products, including Rebecca Grace farm milk, pasteurized but not homogenized so the cream rises to the top. "We're really excited about the milk," Evans said. His wife, Jennie, is making homemade strawberry and blackberry jam, plus fried apple and peach pies for the store.

Haney has a unique perspective on the killing freeze, because his family has been in the orchard business 135 years.



"We've been doing this a long time. This is not the first time this has happened," he said. The family lost a crop in 1986, another in the mid-1950s "and my great grandfather lost a crop in 1915.

"It's hard, but you survive," he said.

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